



THE FATEFUL CURSE

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A DISCLAIMER

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THE TASK



It was a beautiful morning in Fairborn. The sun had just risen, touching a small red-stone cottage set apart from its neighbors. Light streamed into the kitchen, falling in golden rays through the window.

I was making tea, gazing at the realm outside. The drink was made of sunflowers from the Star-dusts, Fairborn's only mountain range.

It was also expensive — normally, I wouldn't use it.

Not today. It was PEARL 11, 1700 Standard Time (ST), a day I had entirely to myself.

I was in an excellent mood — despite the neighbor boy, who'd been tossing stones at my window. I had the three things I liked best — peace, quiet, and solitude — and only wished to enjoy myself.

There was a loud knock.

My wings hummed, and I poured half the boiling water into the sunflower-shaped sink without realizing. I gripped the edge, gritting my teeth and trying not to swear. I set down the teakettle and flew to the door, turquoise wings fluttering faster.

Outside was the last being I expected: a messenger fairy from Sunrise Palace.

“Are you Chryssa Silverwing?” Her voice was soft.

“What do you want?” I snapped, looking her over.

The messenger wore a short green dress, a large satchel, and pointed shoes — all common to her profession. She fiddled with the hem. “Her Majesty apologizes for the disturbance, but you must come to the palace.”

She glanced behind her, fluttering at the steps lead-

ing to the door.

“And?” My foot tapped the air.

“You’ll have to let me in.” A hint of steel entered the fairy’s voice. “Her Majesty’s orders. We can’t be overheard.”

“Fine.” I snorted, jaw clenching. “But make it quick.”

I opened the door just enough for her to slip through before slamming it shut.

“Have a seat.” I gestured to the main room. My tone made the request more like an order.

My guest looked at the seats. There were two moldy mushrooms, some smaller mushroom stools, and something similar to moss but so strange that it might’ve been anything.

She shook her head, fluttering nearby instead.

“Suit yourself.” I sat on one, — giant and red, with white spots — ignoring the squishing. I raised an eyebrow. “Well? What’s the rest?”

“There is an assignment from Her Majesty. You must come to the palace to receive it,” the fairy said. She fidgeted, seeming eager to leave.

I scoffed. “That’s all?”

The messenger nodded. She moved back, arms crossed as if she were trying to disappear.

“Why in Fairborn would Her Majesty give me an assignment?” I frowned at her vacant expression. “Are you even listening?”

“Sorry.” My guest blushed. She glanced around, taking in every detail. “This room is so ... different.”

I sighed. *I hate admitting it. But ... she’s right.*

It was odd, not just because of the dilapidated seats. Most of the walls were covered in multicolored stains, as if the painters had added another color partway through. The floor was brown red-stone, coated in a thin layer of dust. The only tidy part was the fireplace, though that was because it almost burned down the cottage when dirty.

“Are you an apothecary?” Her tone was curious.

“Why?” I glared, crossing my arms. *I saw you looking around. I don’t appreciate the intrusion.*

The messenger shrugged. “You seem the type. Between the neglected furniture, spotted walls...” She laughed. “And your hair.”

“What’s wrong with it?” I touched the nut-brown bun.

“It’s only a little stained.” Her tone was defensive.

“I’m not the fairy who’s nosy.”

“Bold words for somefairy banished for that,” she muttered.

That’s it. “Get out of my cottage!” I fluttered in the air, pointing an angry finger at the door. I heard every word, little messenger. I didn’t like a single one.

“I can’t!” She flinched at my enraged expression.
“Her Majesty said—”

“I don’t care! Leave my cottage, or I’ll force you out!”

“But—”

I moved towards her, fluttering higher so she had to crane her neck. “Get. OUT!”

“All right, all right! I’m going.” Her hands went to her hips. “Don’t be surprised if the Queen sends a guard. She wants you today.”

My expression was menacing. “Then he’ll have to destroy the cottage.”

She shrugged. “Suit yourself.” She flew to the door

and opened it, not looking at me. “Fly by you soon, Miss Silverwing. I would wish you a nice day, but I don’t think you deserve it.”

She flew outside. For a moment, I thought she was gone.

Then she turned.

“I don’t envy you. You may be a good apothecary
—”

I slammed the door.



It took me a long time to relax, and longer to realize that I knew my guest.

At least, I had.

The fairy was Blossom Thistledown, one of my classmates from long ago. Bright, inquisitive, and an incessant chatterbox, she was always running errands for somefairy. I’d seen her dressed as a messenger while at the Palace. But I’d forgotten about her, like so many others. It was much easier than dealing with the past.

The sun was at its zenith when I began washing the dishes, trying to regain some sense of normalcy.

As a child, cleaning them had always been my chore.

I hated it then, but now...

I sighed, up to my elbows in hot, soapy water. *It's different.* I scrubbed a plate, splashing the countertop. *I miss those days sometimes. It's...*

“No,” I said aloud, shaking my head. “You are not flying that path. It’s been such a lovely day.”

I pulled a worn piece of fabric from the cabinets, drying a nearby dish. I smiled, and picked up my usual teacup ... when the front door fell, crushing my favorite mushroom stool!

“What in Fairborn?” I exclaimed.

The cup slipped, smashing to bits on the floor. I flew in the air, biting back a few choice words.

“Who are you?” I demanded.

Brown hair. Green eyes. Emerald wings...

My eyes widened. Like a dragonfly’s, but larger. I sucked in a breath. “*Robin?*”

He raised an eyebrow. “You threw Blossom out of

your cottage?”

“She deserved it.” My arms crossed. “Why are you here? More importantly, why did you break my door?”

“And your teacup.” He removed his wand from its holder, mending the item in a flash of emerald light. “The door was an accident.”

“Don’t change the subject.” I snatched the cup, setting it on the table. “Why are you here?”

“To take you to the palace.” The wand returned to its sheath. “Our Queen means to meet with you. I’m authorized to drag you if necessary.” He stood at attention. “As Her Majesty commands.”

“What a surprise.” I sighed. “Fine. I’ll go with you.”

I spun away, wings fluttering.

“You’ll need your satchel,” he called.

I turned. “What do you think I’m getting, Robin? My favorite dress?”

I flew to my bedroom near the back of the cottage, wings almost humming the entire way. I groped around for my apothecary satchel, slipping it over my head. Armed with its familiar weight, I returned.

“Let’s go.” I pushed past Robin, fluttering to the

door.

A hand stopped me, resting on my shoulder.

“You’ll follow me to the palace. Her Majesty’s orders.”

I threw it off. “I won’t follow you anywhere.”

“But you will stay beside me.” His expression was rigid.

“If you insist.” My head was high.

Inwardly, I was startled. *Robin’s never this stern.*

He paused. “I’ll repair your door, and we’ll be on our way.”

He flicked his wand. It rejoined the frame, the dirt and scratches vanishing in a flash of emerald light.

He nodded once, then flew away.

I had to chase after him.

“I wish you would care about me as well,” I muttered. I fluttered behind, attempting to avoid him.

To my annoyance, he matched my pace.

“I do.” I dipped mid-air — he’d heard. “Or I wouldn’t be taking you to the palace.”

“I disagree.” I sped up to pass him.

“Chryssa.”

I was tempted to glare, but frowned instead.

He didn't let me go. My eyebrows drew closer. Why in Fairborn would he want to be around somefairy who caused him so much trouble? We haven't seen each other in ages!

“Tell me what you’re thinking.” His tone held a note of concern. “I want to help.”

“You should’ve done that before.”

“I did.” He raised an eyebrow. “You refused to accept it.”

“Because I absolutely would’ve humiliated myself to keep my profession.” I rolled my eyes. “You know me well, Robin Redstone. Very well indeed.”

He let out a long sigh. “Chryssa, it’s been ninety-nine years. Why won’t you admit you were wrong?”

I stiffened. Visions of my family raced through my head, combined with echoes of their warnings about humans.

I shook my head, banishing the cacophony. “I wonder why.”

“It was your family’s fault,” Robin insisted. “Can’t you trust that?”

More images ran through my head. I tensed. *How can I, when even my oldest friend has turned against me?*

“Listen to me.” My expression was earnest. “Humans are the problem. They caused my banishment and my family’s deaths. Nothing else.”

He met my gaze. “Then trust this. I’ve always wanted to be your friend.” He sobered. “But unless you admit you were wrong, nothing will change.”

I let out a wry laugh, focusing on the sky behind him. “You always did enjoy it.”

“Maybe you’re too afraid.” He shrugged. “It was terrible before. Why shouldn’t it be now?”

I stared at the emerald grass, pretending fascination.

His words were too accurate for comfort.

Absorbed in my thoughts, I fell behind. Robin wore his usual uniform: a brown shirt with gold buttons, accented with a green belt, wand holder, and boots. His hair was slightly untidy.

A memory surfaced of his mother scolding him...

I shook my head. Needing a distraction, I gazed at the surrounding landscape.

The sun shone, the air crisp and yet pleasantly warm, unchanged since Fairborn's founding. Miles of luscious grass stretched in every direction, dotted with clusters of every tree imaginable. The Stardusts loomed in the distance, majestic against the horizon.

My breath caught. *We once planned a trip there...*

Just then, the palace gates appeared. I fluttered back, more awed than usual. The pair loomed over us — an intricate framework of silver, delicate and strong.

Years ago, these would've been welcoming. I craned my neck. *Now ... now they're only foreboding.* I shuddered. *This place exposes too many memories.*

“An errand for Her Majesty,” Robin told the guard.

He bowed.

A spear flashed, its razor-sharp point inches from his chest.

He didn't move.

Eventually, the gesture worked. The sentry nodded, flying aside.

Next came the front doors. They shone golden and tall, etched with scenes from Fairborn's history. There

was another guard, but the scene at the gates repeated here, and we were soon inside.

We flew through the corridors. Everything around us, even the floor itself, was polished marble of every variety. The flight to the throne room seemed an eternity, and my uneasiness only grew.

We soon entered the throne room.

As we flew, I felt a strange sense of familiarity. This was a space I recognized, somewhere I spent countless hours as the Fairy Queen's wingmaiden. I knew its shining floors, lofty ceiling, and enormous columns better than anywhere.

I should be excited. I touched my stomach; it didn't feel normal. *But I feel ... ill.*

Something twisted inside me.

A fairy sat on the throne, considered the loveliest in Fairborn. Tall and confident, her wings held the same dazzling array of colors as a sunset, surrounding her in a halo of light. A delicate diamond crown rested on her forehead, worn by every ruler since Fairborn's founding. Its brilliance almost blinded us.

It was the Fairy Queen.

“Thank you for bringing her.” Her voice was as lovely as ever. She nodded towards Robin. “You may return to your duties.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” He bowed. “But before I go...”

He turned to me, holding out a crystal leaf.

“Just for emergencies,” he said. He opened my satchel, placing it inside.

I resisted the urge to slap away his hand.

“Remember what I said.” He met my eyes. “I meant every word.”

He was gone before my reply.

“Chryssa Silverwing.” The Queen laughed. I refastened the clasp, avoiding her gaze. “It’s been a long time.”

“That tends to happen when you’re banished.” I tugged the satchel into place, suppressing a glare.

“Why am I here?”

“I apologize for bringing you.” She paused. “But you’re the only fairy for this task, and we cannot waste time.” She met my eyes. “You will go to Archer City, where you will find a human girl. One who is under a curse.”

Silence fell.

“You want me to go to the Outer Realm?” I pointed to myself. “Of all fairies, you want *me*?”

“Yes,” Her Majesty said. “You once assisted me in breaking curses. I hope you can do the same now.”

“What happened to the Curse-Breakers?”

These fairies were a group created after my banishment. They’d taken on my former position, often aiding the Fairy Queen on any assignments.

There was a long pause.

“I don’t know.”

I shivered. *Her Majesty sounds ... afraid.*

She shook her head. “But there are more pressing matters.” She met my eyes. “Will you accept the task?”

“Why send me?” I crossed my arms. “You know my view of humans.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Must I remind you of BERYL 5, 1000 ST?”

I took a sharp breath.

Everyfairy knew that date, no matter their age or profession. The day Fairborn separated from the

Outer Realm. Fairies and humans had just concluded a devastating war, and we had lost. The separation was to regain dignity, along with control over future encounters.

My eyes widened. *It could happen again.* I suppressed a snort. *Humans do tend to overreact.*

My head dipped. “No need, Your Majesty. I understand.”

“There is one more thing,” the Fairy Queen said. “Establish a relationship with the family as soon as you can.” She paused. “You may break the curse while there. But if not...”

“I understand. They’ll likely mistake me for a human.”

I couldn’t help rolling my eyes. Every time we visited the Outer Realm, I had to keep my temper or the Queen would banish me. It was against Her Majesty’s wishes to do so.

I snorted. *Until it wasn’t.*

“Try not to attract attention,” the Queen agreed. “Your Human Culture class will prove useful.”

“Isn’t there any other fairy?” I almost groaned.

That will help as much as a rampaging unicorn in a thunder of dragons.

She shook her head. “It must be you.”

“Your Majesty—”

“What is your answer?”

I fell silent, considering my options.

I could refuse. But ... Fairborn might cause another war. I groaned. I don't need another scandal. I paused. And I'd be doing this for a human. I shuddered. I truly do hate them.

But ... this is my Queen. I do still respect her.

I shook my head. *I have to decide. She's waiting.*

“As you command, Your Majesty,” I said. “I'll do the task. But don't expect anything to change.”

“Thank you,” the Fairy Queen said. “I am certain you won't regret it.”

I gritted my teeth. *Don't flap to conclusions. I'm sure I will.*

“How will I return?” My expression brightened.

“Can I use the Headquarters?”

The Queen shook her head. “The location is now secret.” She gave a rare smile. “I believe Robin

can be of assistance.”

I gritted my teeth. *No. I'll find my way back without his help.*

She clapped her hands. “It would be best if you left immediately. Do you have everything?”

“An apothecary never leaves without supplies, Your Majesty.” I patted my satchel.

The Fairy Queen nodded. She rose, wand pointed to a sunbeam illuminating the room. She frowned, manipulating it to the nearest of two arches behind the throne. I knew every knot and twist from my visits to the Outer Realm.

It was the simpler one, which meant I was going straight to my destination. Only the Headquarters used the more ornate.

A sparkling golden mist filled the arch. The Fairy Queen waited the customary time before speaking.

“Go through, Chryssa Silverwing,” she finally said. “May Magic guide you home.”

I hesitated. “Your Majesty ... how will I find the girl? Is there a map of Archer City...?”

“You will know.” Her tone was curt and insis-

tent. “Now go.”

I stayed quiet — I wouldn’t be getting any more information. On an impulse, I gave a wobbly curtsy, lowering my head.

Before she could respond, I was flying to the Outer Realm.

About the Author

KIRSTEN HARDIN is a college graduate from Waco, Texas who is starting a Masters in the fall. Like most young adults, she's currently trying to figure out what she's doing with her life. In the meantime, she likes to read, play piano, occasionally crochet — and, of course, write.